

Forced Plunge From Copter To Coerce VC Is Described

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A former Army intelligence agent yesterday said he had twice witnessed Vietnamese thrown to their deaths from Marine helicopters in order to extract information from suspected Vietcong supporters.

The veteran, Kenneth B. Osborn, 26, said that the two victims were pushed out from 200 to 300 feet above the ground in the spring of 1968 over an uninhabited region 15 miles north of Danang.

He spoke out at the second day of a mock tribunal being staged here by an anti-war group, the National Veterans' Inquiry into U.S. War Crimes Policy. The organization has put on similar affairs in 13 other cities but this was the first time that Osborn appeared.

The Pentagon has said it is investigating all allegations of atrocities. Yesterday, a spokesman said that the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam opened an inquiry several months ago into charges that a Vietnamese was hurled from a helicopter. The spokesman, however, did not know whether this examination, still under way, involves the incidents described by Osborn.

Osborn, a native of Baltimore, is a graduate student at American University and now lives at 5205 Sherrier Place,

NW. He outlined his story at the inquiry's public session and then filled in more details for reporters who questioned him more than two hours. He was direct and circumstantial about some matters, but on others he was either deliberately vague or said he could not recall.

This is the essence of Osborn's account:

To avoid the draft, he enlisted in 1966 and volunteered for intelligence. At his training course in Fort Holabird, Md., an intelligence colonel warned students at an orientation lecture that they must make a "moral" decision about staying in a field requiring illegal acts. Only one man, not Osborn, left.

He arrived in Vietnam in September, 1967, and was assigned to the 525th Intelligence Group, First Battalion.

His account continued:

Osborne was sent to Danang where he posed as a Defense Department civilian and established networks embracing 40 to 50 Vietnamese agents. He passed his information on to Marine units stationed there, but complained that he was being disregarded. This, he feared, would also endanger the expense money he was being provided for his agents.

To "prove I was being effectively used," Osborn was in-

stant to observe at first hand the questioning of a suspected Vietcong sympathizer who had been identified by Osborn's network.

He will not name the Marine, but describes him as a former non-commissioned officer in his late thirties, the chief of a Counter Intelligence Interrogation Team for the III Marine Amphibious Force.

Osborn, the officer, two or three Marine enlisted men serving as guards, a Marine pilot and co-pilot took off in a Sikorsky helicopter from Danang in March or April 1968. Their passengers were the suspect, a man in his twenties from the village of Phuongdoc, and the prospective victim, a man in his early thirties. Both had their hands tied behind their backs.

Once aloft, the Marine officer questioned the victim for about 15 minutes in Vietnamese. Twice or three times the man was led to the open door and threatened with expulsion unless he talked. The victim, whom Osborn believes was selected deliberately for his lack of knowledge, was finally seized at the officer's orders by two of the Marine guards and thrown out.

"He screamed on the way down," Osborn recalled.

Then, he said, the suspect, cowering in a corner, acknowledged that he had been recruited by the Vietcong and that he had buried a weapons cache in his garden. Osborn said that this cache was later found.

In late April, 1968, Osborn said, the same officer, now a captain, invited him along for a similar ride. The intelligence agent, then an enlisted man, fourth grade, could not remember as many details of this incident. But he said that once again a man he thought had no knowledge was pushed from the helicopter to frighten a genuine suspect into talking.

Osborn also told of seeking out a Central Intelligence Agency official in Danang to supply him with political information in exchange for extra amounts of expense

money to pay agents. Osborn identified the CIA official as Foster Phipps, whose "cover" title was coordinator, Combined Studies Division. The Army veteran said that he received "wads of piasters," perhaps several hundred thousands, under this arrangement.

Osborn was discharged in October, 1969, with a Bronze Star medal. He said he has several times visited the CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., to supply information to a friend he had known at Danang. Last spring, he said, this friend proposed that the CIA subsidize his graduate studies and then enroll him in the agency.

Osborn declined. He said:

"I waited maybe a year (after leaving Vietnam) to get my head on straight. I didn't have any real guilt hangups there."

But back home, he continued, he decided:

"These things are wrong. America has no place in Vietnam. What little good we do is outdone ten times by the bad I'm a Christian. I'd like to neutralize what we were doing in Southeast Asia."

This, he said, led him to speak out.